

**Statement by United States Security Coordinator
Lieutenant General Keith W. Dayton**

House International Relations Committee

March 2, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate this opportunity to address the committee today.

It is quite clear that the seismic shift in Palestinian politics produced by January's PLC elections will have consequences for the security sector, although it is still too early to know exactly how they will play out.

Let me first address the past and current security situation. As we all know, before elections, the level of activity and performance of the Palestinian leadership and security forces in confronting terrorists, collecting weapons, dismantling terrorist organizations, and consolidating and right-sizing the security sector was disappointing. I believe it was well-understood by Fatah that the future of security reform programs and international assistance rested with progress against these benchmarks, and that inaction would jeopardize future international support. Yet the pre-election campaign environment, the obstacles on the political and economic tracks, and the lack of political will resulted in little progress in either security sector performance or reform. There *had* been sporadic, localized, internal PA security cooperation. However, such cooperation was not the norm and tended to evaporate quickly due to the PA's internal political crisis. And this ineffectiveness tended to reinforce the Israeli propensity to operate unilaterally in self-defense.

There were some bright spots, which bear mention. Israel's disengagement from Gaza and parts of the northern West Bank went forward in a secure environment and with a great deal of on-the-ground coordination between the Israeli Defense Forces and the Palestinian Authority security forces (PASF). The international crossing at Rafah opened in late November under carefully negotiated security arrangements and with the essential support of the EU's Border Assistance Mission. And, despite an uptick in lawlessness and numerous warnings of violence on election day, the legislative elections went forward without a hitch in a safe, secure, and free environment.

In addition, fears of post-election violence have not, so far, been borne out. Under the current caretaker government, the security services remain more or less in place while the victors and the opposition sort out the political arrangements. On the ground, we see some continuing examples of local cooperation between the Israeli Defense Forces and Palestinian Security Forces as they continue to grapple with the necessities of daily life. In other words, caution and deliberation seem to be prevailing, at least for the moment. And my team and I continue to build upon the efforts started by General Ward to work with the parties and key regional actors to support that stability so that the political and diplomatic levels have time and opportunity to do their work. I want to particularly note contributions of the Government of Egypt, which has made determined and effective efforts to maintain the current state of calm.

With this in mind, we are of course following suit with the other arms of the U.S. Government in reviewing our program and approach in light of Hamas' victory. To date American support for the PASF has focused on advice and guidance to support their own efforts at reform, while playing a coordinating role with the other prospective security donors. For

example, under the excellent leadership of General Ward, our team worked with the PA's Ministry of the Interior back in the fall to launch a "white paper" process that would help define a Palestinian National Security Strategy and the missions, roles, and responsibilities of the PASF. We have also had an active role in following up on November's Agreement on Movement and Access, including the EU's work to resolve concerns and complaints about the operations at Rafah. While we did provide non-lethal equipment to the PASF in the fall to help maintain stability after Israel's disengagement, and worked with other donors – and with Israel – to meet other Disengagement-related non-lethal needs of the PASF, we have refrained from launching any larger-scale program while we sought to understand the scope of the challenge and the necessary next steps.

Prior to the elections, when looking at the question of broad-based security sector reform, it had become clear to me that future efforts would need to go beyond advising and consulting and more on assertive action to function as a "change agent" in advancing reform. It was also clear that any effort of ours or of the international community's would be inseparable from the need for a strong, political-level decision by the Palestinian Authority to move unequivocally away from confrontation with Israel and towards a proper role of protecting Palestinian civilians and preventing terror.

Obviously Hamas' election victory throws these conclusions into question. All agree that Palestinian Authority security performance is key to any progress along the Roadmap and towards the two-state solution. I feel strongly that, in the long-term, effective Palestinian Authority security performance will require broad-based security sector reform – in terms of mandate, structure, personnel, training. Progress on security sector reform, however, is contingent on there being a Palestinian Authority Government in place with which we can work. This of course depends on whether or not the new government chooses to accept the principles that the international community has set out for it. While the Palestinian Authority Presidency might very well continue to maintain its authority over some, or perhaps even all, of the PASF, it is a very complicated legal and policy question of whether we could continue to work with those elements. My team is studying the options and working in close consultation with our diplomatic missions in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and of course with the policy level in Washington as to where we go next.

The majority of Palestinians, Israelis, and the international community continue to aspire to the two-state solution, and that future state of Palestine would need effective security forces. Working with Palestinian civil society – on ideas related to national security strategy, demobilization of militias, and the inculcation of democratic, civilian governance of security forces – could be one direction. Similarly, it is worth considering what the security architecture of a future Palestinian state *should* look like. There is little reason to think that it should resemble the Arafat-era structure of duplicative roles and competing forces. Clearer role definition, consolidation of services, and right-sizing are only some of the elements that need to be seriously considered in any planning effort.

Regardless of what we can do now or in the near future on the subject of PA security sector reform, importantly, the USSC team would hope to continue to monitor and advise on Israeli-Palestinian security coordination, an important component of the Roadmap and crucial to maintaining any hope of avoiding a major humanitarian disaster.

We are clearly at a crossroads. Until now, PA inertia, political squabbling, and campaigning have stood in the way of a clear and strategic decision to move forward with

immediate security action and longer-term, broad-based reform. Palestinian political will – not capacity or capability – has been the primary obstacle to security action. Now we add all the uncertainty and complications of a Hamas-led government. With the elections behind us, the Palestinians and their leadership are now forced to confront a stark choice: implement Abu Mazen's prior commitment to disarm militias, consolidate and reduce security personnel, and move forward with security sector reform through peaceful means. Or choose continued confrontation and potentially chaos.

Let me note in closing that I am convinced that only the United States can lead the effort for Palestinian security sector reform. I have worked hard in the past weeks to establish credibility with the Israelis, Palestinians, Quartet partners, and the international donor community. We have the outlines of a campaign plan to guide our efforts. But we must have a capable partner, committed to peace. Hamas' failure to date to accept the principles established by the Quartet halts our ability to make any progress, and the decisions taken by a Hamas-run PA government may derail our efforts. But while we must now clearly wait to see how the situation unfolds, I encourage us all to be cautious before we rush to the conclusion that the effort is not worth it. Security sector reform remains fundamental to achieving a Palestinian state at peace with its neighbors and responsive to the needs of its people at home.

Thank you, and I will be happy to take your questions.